

Lives of Diversity: Indigenous Australia

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the 2006 Census, produced in cooperation with
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Lives of Diversity: Indigenous Australia

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1. Locating Indigenous lives

The continuance of substantial diversity between the lives of Indigenous¹ and non-Indigenous Australians is manifest within data from the 2006 Census. The national picture is one of difference across nearly all the Census dimensions. The Indigenous population is significantly younger and growing at a faster rate; the economic items reveal broad-scale division; cultural differences are apparent around language and family life and there are discernible disconnections across the spatial dimensions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives.

But this aggregate perspective does not tell the full diversity story. An Australian Indigenous population analytical base, with its national patterns and trends, obscures the broader diversity of Indigenous lives. Standard disaggregation to state and territory level elicits the same limitations. While Indigenous lives are obviously lived within national and state and territory boundaries, it is their locations in specific places and spaces that most influence their shape, context and circumstances. Geographical place, at the level of the town, the region, the sector of the city or the community, is central to the conditions and milieus in which those lives are lived.

For most Indigenous Australians, such locations are urban. While media and public understandings are firmly directed towards discrete Indigenous communities, with an emphasis on the remote, most reside outside such places. Sydney is the place with the largest Indigenous population and the primary sites of current population increase are the cities of Brisbane, Broome and Coffs Harbour, not remote communities in the Northern Territory or Western Australia. Yes, Indigenous people remain significantly more likely to live in remote areas than other Australians, but nearly a third live in metropolitan areas, nearly half reside in regional areas and only a little over one quarter live their lives in remote sites. Indigenous individuals, families and communities have been urban residents since early colonial times and overall population trends indicate an ongoing Indigenous drift to the larger urban centres.

1.1 Places and people and people in places

The pattern of Indigenous locational spaces raises two related, but different, questions. First, how do the lives of Indigenous people living in different places and spaces compare with those of Indigenous people living in other geographical locations? Second, how do Indigenous lives, lived across different categories of place, compare with those of non-Indigenous people in the same locations? It is the mosaic of similarities and differences between Indigenous lives and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives emerging from these two questions that gives substance to the picture of diversity that can be unearthed from the Census 2006 data². And it is these two questions that are addressed in this essay.

These questions are important because locational diversity is missing from most analyses of Indigenous census data. The broad-stroke labelling under the bland and essentialising category of the 'Indigenous population' inherent in national, state or even geographical categories such as remote or urban, decontextualises and depersonalises the diversity of lived experience by place. Such categorisations also blunt the compelling impact of statistical data about Indigenous lives. More critically, even a cursory understanding of Indigenous

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Australia makes evident that such categorisations are statistical conveniences, not a reflective picture. For while Indigeneity is shared, and this shared status is acknowledged and recognised, it is Indigenous peoples, each with a unique history, affiliation to country and cultural identity, who make up the Australian Indigenous population. It is as *Walpiri, Noongar, Yorta Yorta, Yolgnu, Quandamooka* and many other peoples that Indigenous Australians primarily identify. Strong links to the home country of the broader family group is retained and maintained, even if individuals or families are not presently physically living in those locations. For example, data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey of 2002 finds that nearly three quarters of Indigenous people recognise homelands or traditional country.

Place also has meaning and the interpretive meanings of place, in both their current and past context, are fundamental to contemporary Indigenous lives. The relationship between a specific population and its location – that is, the story of how, when and why this particular group of Indigenous people came to be living in this place at this time – is a vital underpinning facet of current life circumstance, both for the individual and the family and community of that individual. These spatial and temporal aspects structure Indigenous lives within these places in 2006. History and place are entwined. Concepts of spaces and places also provide a useful division on which to found this essay's two questions: diversity within and without Indigenous lives.

In order to personalise these data and bring the realm of the lived experience of the individuals and communities that they represent to the fore, the task is here anchored to three specific locations: one remote – Maningrida in the Northern Territory; one regional – Dubbo in New South Wales; and one metropolitan – Perth, in Western Australia. These particular sites are primarily chosen as exemplars for their geographic spread across the continent. The distinction between a discrete Indigenous township, such as Maningrida, with Indigenous/non-Indigenous shared geographic locations, such as Perth and Dubbo, also allows dimensions not usually examined within census collections to come to the fore. Examining spatiality, for example, captures elements of the interaction between populations. Such analyses provide insights into the lived terrain of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and a spatial interpretative frame also permits a comparative view of the diversity of Indigenous lives within and alongside the broader social, cultural, political and economic factors of particular places.

1.2 Indigenous Australians and the census

The general Australian definition states that an Indigenous person is one who:

- has Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by the community in which he or she lives.

This definition is widely accepted within government departments, statutory bodies and institutions, but sometimes contested by Aboriginal groups. Since 1996 the ABS has adopted a standard question which asks: '*Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?*' and responses to this question determine Indigenous status within the broader data.

ABS figures for June 2006 estimate that 517,200 people, or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population, are Indigenous. The majority identify as Aboriginal, with six per cent (33,267 people) identifying as being of Torres Strait Islander origin only and another 4 per cent (20,070 people) advising that they are of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin³. It is important to note that, while conventionally combined for statistical purposes, the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are not homogeneous and have substantial demographic, social and cultural differences.

Over half of all Indigenous Australians reside in just two states: New South Wales and Queensland. Sheer numbers, however, are not reflective of population proportions or their geographic distributions. As shown in the figures below, while 28 per cent of Indigenous people live in New South Wales, Indigenous people make up less than three per cent of that State's population. Conversely the Northern Territory is home to 13 per cent of the national Indigenous population but nearly one in three Territorians is Indigenous. In other states less than five per cent of the population is Indigenous. And while 95 per cent of the New South Wales Indigenous population lives in major cities or regional areas, in Western Australia 41 per cent lives in remote areas.

Figure 1. Indigenous population by state and as a proportion of population

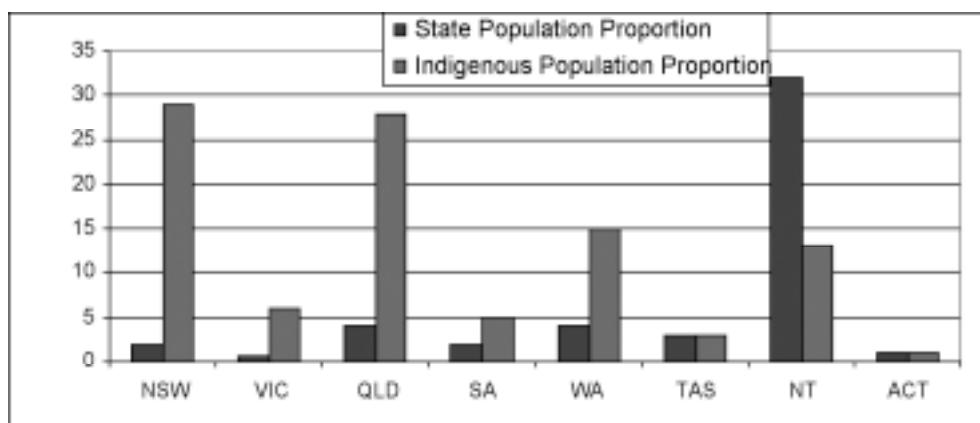
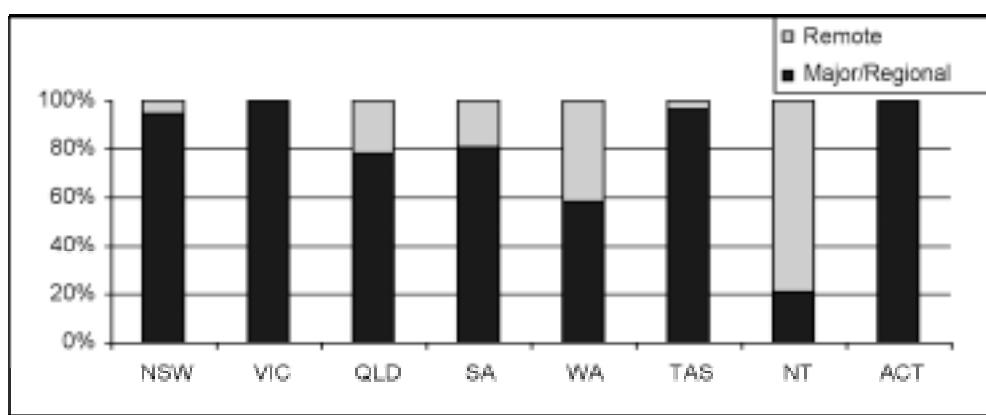


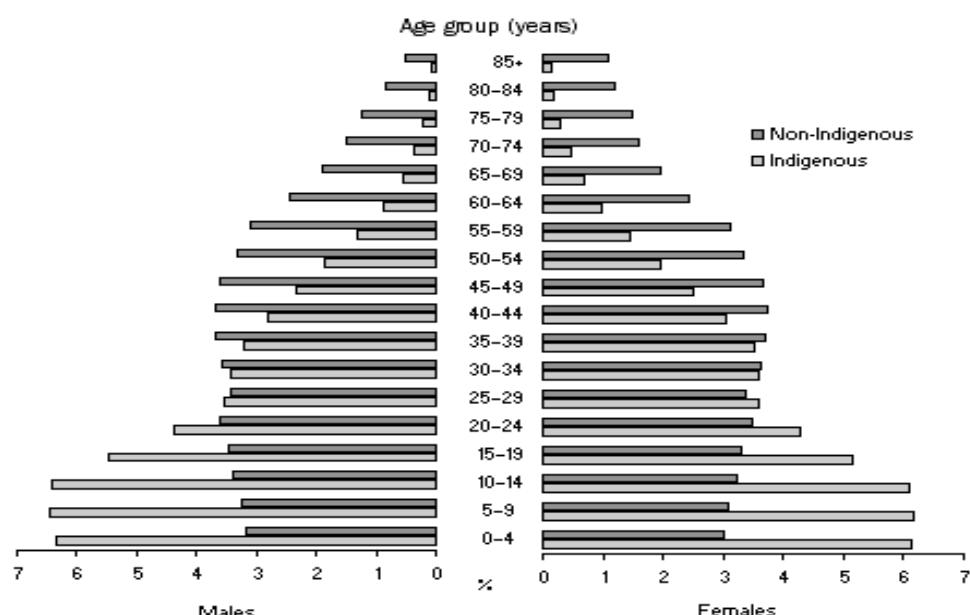
Figure 2. Indigenous population by state and residency area



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While remaining proportionally small, the Indigenous population is growing. Total numbers increased in the Census period 2001-2006 by 11 per cent and this followed substantial rises in previous census periods. Again, such growth varies between states. Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory all experienced Indigenous population growth of between 16 and 18 per cent in this period and New South Wales and Victoria also recorded 10 per cent increases in their Indigenous populations. Tasmania was the only state with a decreasing Indigenous population, down three per cent from 2001. While better enumeration, alongside a greater willingness to identify as Indigenous within the Census, is a factor, the standout difference is the dramatically different age structures. The Indigenous population is much younger, with a median age of just 21 years (meaning half are aged 21 years or less) compared with the non-Indigenous median of 37 years. This translates into an Indigenous population where the proportion aged less than 15 years is more than double that of non-Indigenous Australians. Conversely, only three per cent of Indigenous people are aged 65 years or over compared with 13 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.

Figure 3. Age distribution of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population



Source: ABS Catalogue number 3238.0.55.001 (2008)

Two key factors of Indigenous life are reflected in these data: higher fertility and lower life expectancy. In the Indigenous population women currently have more children and at a younger age. In 2005 the Indigenous fertility rate was 2.06 babies per woman (1.81 nationally) with peak fertility age occurring during women's early twenties (30-34 years nationally). And low life expectancy is an entrenched reality for Indigenous people. While data are compromised by incomplete records, Indigenous Australians have a lower life expectancy of between 17 and 20 years⁴. In states where records on Indigenous mortality are most reliable (Qld, SA, WA, and NT) three quarters of Indigenous men die before they reach the

age of 65 compared with only one quarter of non-Indigenous men. For Indigenous women, 60 per cent will not make their sixty-fifth birthday compared with 16 per cent of non-Indigenous women.

1.3 Making contextual sense of Indigenous census data

Understanding and interpreting Indigenous census statistics requires their placement in their historical, social and economic context. Indigenous data is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until amended by the 1967 referendum, the 1901 Commonwealth Constitution specifically excluded Indigenous Australians from official population figures, stating:

- s. 127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.

This exclusion is attributed to the fiscal concerns of south-eastern colonies with (by 1901) low Indigenous populations. These states feared that those with higher Indigenous populations would be unfairly financially advantaged within the new Commonwealth⁵. The section, therefore, seems aimed at ensuring that those states with large Aboriginal populations, Western Australia and Queensland predominantly, were not able to claim a 'disproportionate' amount of Commonwealth monies via the inclusion of Indigenous people in their official counts.

The first inclusion of Indigenous Australians in official population figures began with the 1971 Census. The process of reliable collection of Indigenous data has proceeded slowly since, and though considerable progress has been made, reliability and validity issues still exist. The mobility and difficulty of access to some of the Indigenous population mean its size and composition is never fully captured within the Census. The ABS issues experimental estimates, rather than full population counts, to take these data collection difficulties into account. Although questions around the accuracy and completeness of Indigenous data remain, census collections provide the best data source available, in terms of accuracy and coverage, to allow insight into contemporary Indigenous lives.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the vibrancy and diversity of Indigenous lives cannot be fully captured from the Census. Rather, this perspective, predicated on statistical patterns, can only ever tell one dimension of the story. The place of Indigenous people and Indigenous peoples within the Australian population, society and nation is far more complex, nuanced and shot through with a plethora of changing and static cultural, historical, political and social factors than any examination of statistical data can alone reveal.

2. Living an Indigenous life in Dubbo

Dubbo is a major regional hub for western New South Wales. Situated a little over 400 kilometres northwest of Sydney, the town sits within Wiradjuri country and the traditional owners of the Dubbo area are the Tubbagah people. The area's main industries are retail, health, manufacturing, transport, tourism, education, construction and business services, with retail trade and community health services the fields of highest employment. Dubbo also serves as a centre for medical, educational, government and private sector services for the much larger population residing in the broader Orana regions of New South Wales.

Census data for 2006 estimates an Indigenous population of 3910 in the Dubbo area, living alongside a non-Indigenous population of 33,933. This Indigenous population is swelled by significant intra-regional migration, with Indigenous people from surrounding areas coming to Dubbo for short or long term reasons, including children's education, medical treatment and legal issues. It is this high level of intra-area mobility, as well as anecdotal evidence

suggesting that the 2001 Census at least did not capture the complete Indigenous population, that is behind convincing claims that the Indigenous population in Dubbo is dramatically under-estimated. For example, a 2005 paper prepared under the Indigenous Community Leadership Development Program (CDEP), estimates that the proportion of Indigenous residents in Dubbo is actually closer to 25 per cent of the population. Citing inconsistent and low counts of CDEP participants and public housing tenants the report cautions that Indigenous census statistics for the region should be regarded as a sub-set of the Indigenous population, rather than *the* Indigenous population.

2.1 Significance and history of place

For its Indigenous people, the country in which Dubbo is situated has specific significance. The Terramungamine area, in particular, is a traditional gathering area, evidenced by axe-, spear- and knife-sharpening indentations in stones alongside the river and the cultural tradition, memory and practice of Dubbo's current Indigenous population. Aboriginal people occupied the lands surrounding Dubbo for many thousands of years, hunting on the plains and living alongside the rivers. The Dubbo area has an Aboriginal history; one that necessarily also intersects with the non-Indigenous history of the region. Such intersections, however, are not prominent in current historical records. Documents from an on-line search of 'History of Dubbo' focus strongly on the European settlement but are virtually silent on the Aboriginal history. If mention is made it is only to point out that 'Dubbo' is the Aboriginal word for red ochre or red earth, although how the term became known and then taken up by European settlers is unexplained. Furthermore, Indigenous Dubbo residents express considerable doubt about the veracity of this stated origin of the town's name.

And while the electronically accessible histories of the area begin with the visit by John Oxley and his party in 1818, the history of Wiradjuri resistance to colonial incursions into traditional lands is absent. The 'Dubbo Stories', a large exhibition at the Dubbo Regional Museum of the story of the area from colonial times, for instance, while emphasising the connections to Thubbagah Dreaming in its brochure, contains only two cases relating to the Aboriginal history of the region and these are examples of traditional implements. Yet, colonist/Aboriginal confrontations occurred until at least the 1850s. Records of 1842 note that the local Aboriginal people were becoming more audacious and killing and wounding are recorded of both Aboriginal occupants and non-Indigenous settlers.

By the time Dubbo was declared a village in 1865, open warfare had largely dissipated in the face of rapidly growing levels of non-Indigenous settlement and supportive infrastructure. By then the Aboriginal people were largely restricted to living in the 'station camps' on what were now settler-owned stations with many employed in the pastoral economy of the area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁶.

The recorded Aboriginal population in the area around Dubbo was listed as 741 people in the early 1880s when the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board was established. The Board opened the Talbaragar Reserve on the outskirts of the town in 1898. The establishment of the reserve coincided with the region's transition from pastoralism to agriculturalism, a change that transformed land tenure in the area⁷. For non-Indigenous landholders it meant a move from a few large holdings to more numerous smaller selections. For the Aboriginal population the result was broad exclusion from traditional lands, which were now fenced and cropped, and a reduction in available employment.

The powers of the Aboriginal Protection Board over Aboriginal lives increased under the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (NSW)*. Aboriginal people could be prevented from camping around towns, were precluded from being sold alcohol and were largely excluded from voting at the state or federal level. A later extension of Board powers included the provision to

remove children and 1500 children were separated from their families in New South Wales by the Board between 1912 and 1938⁸. In Dubbo, older Indigenous residents remember Indigenous children being taken away. They also recollect the welfare officer coming out to Talbaragar in the side car of the police motorbike; when the bike was heard on the track to the reserve, children knew to head off into the bush⁹.

Throughout the 1930s other powers were garnered by the Board. These extended to the right to order that an Aboriginal person's wages be paid to an official rather than the worker and the power to order an Aboriginal person to undergo medical treatment. Such control was resisted. Indigenous resident William Ferguson launched the Aboriginal Protection Association in Dubbo in 1937 to lobby government on behalf of Aboriginal rights and living conditions. In response to the lack of reform he also coordinated the National Day of Mourning in 1938¹⁰. Despite the work of Ferguson and others, the legislative, social, cultural and economic restrictions over Aboriginal lives in New South Wales did not start to be overturned until the early 1960s. And it wasn't until 1969, two years after the 1967 referendum, that the Aboriginal Welfare Board was replaced by a government department¹¹.

Apart from some of the original old gates, nearly all evidence of the more than 80-year occupation of Talbaragar has now gone. While only five families still resided there in the 1960s, a magazine of the era, *Dawn*¹², wrote that Talbaragar had both a school and a teacher. Ex-residents fondly remember life on the reserve, but there is no doubt that it was hard and without basic amenities such as running water. The same *Dawn* article reports that (in 1962) the reserve was disappearing under the Aboriginal Welfare Board's assimilation policy and its residents were being relocated to 'attractive townhouses in Dubbo' as the reserve was progressively demolished.

An unintended result of the move away from Talbaragar into Dubbo was the heavy concentration of Aboriginal residents within the town's public housing areas. The now-infamous Gordon Estate situated in the west of Dubbo, known nationally in the media for its high crime rate and reported riots on New Year's Eve 2005, is an unhappy example¹³. Currently being progressively dismantled, with a number of homes being sold at public auction and others torn down, the estate's demise and the relocation of its residents provokes mixed feelings. While an opportunity for better quality housing is welcomed, the loss of community and history and relocation of many residents is felt deeply. Older long term residents, while acknowledging that the area has its problems, would strongly prefer to remain in their current homes in their familiar neighbourhood. Reliant as they are on the state housing department for rental accommodation the pressure to move to new places is not always seen by these residents in terms of genuine choice¹⁴.

In 1995 the Tubbahah people lodged a native title claim over the 16.2 hectare Terramungamine Reserve, situated 12 kilometres north of Dubbo. This claim was contested by local and state authorities on the basis of public access and the presence of an historic stock trail in the area. An agreement was finally struck over the use of the Terramungamine Reserve in 2002¹⁵. The agreement protects the Aboriginal burial ground and reserves part of the area for the preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage, as well as guaranteeing continuing public access to the riverside area and the protection of the non-Indigenous historical sites.

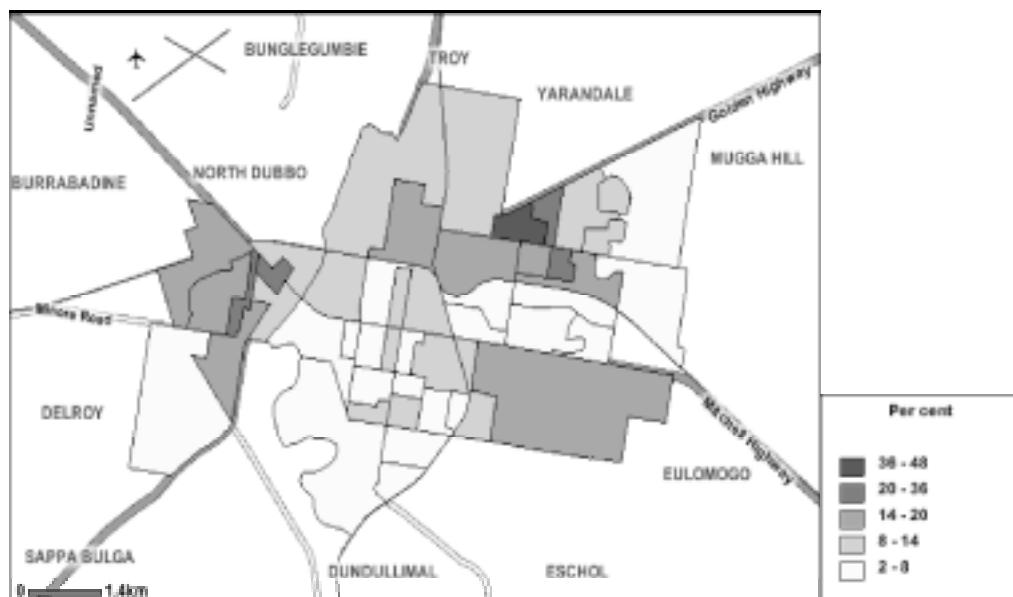
2.2 Life circumstances of place in Dubbo

The 2006 Census data tells us that as an Indigenous person in Dubbo you are likely to be young. The median Indigenous age is 17 years and more than half (54%) of the population is aged 19 or below. In comparison the median age of the non-Indigenous population of Dubbo is 37 years, and about 28 per cent is aged 19 or below. Conversely 13 per cent of the non-Indigenous population is aged 65 years or older compared with only three per cent of the Indigenous population. This difference cannot be fully explained by the higher proportion of young Indigenous people. Rather it suggests, although no official figures are available, that an Indigenous person in Dubbo can anticipate a lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous residents.

At home in Dubbo

As shown on the map below, you are also likely to live in either West Dubbo (where the Gordon Estate is located) or on the eastern side of town. The spatial segregation is quite marked with Indigenous residents concentrated in just a few areas. Indigenous and non-Indigenous households tend to be clustered separately. This spatial division is related to other social and economic divisions. Very few Indigenous residents live in the more prosperous South Dubbo area and the majority of the Indigenous population resides in the least advantaged regions of the town. On a residential index of dissimilarity¹⁶, a widely used measure indicating level of racial segregation, 40 per cent of Indigenous people in Dubbo would need to change their collection district for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to be evenly distributed throughout the town.

Map 1. Dubbo Indigenous residence: 2006



Source: 2006 Census MapStats; Dubbo (State Suburb)

As an Indigenous person in Dubbo, within these residential areas, you are likely to live in rental accommodation. Only eight per cent of Indigenous households own their own home outright compared with 31 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. Twenty-six per cent of Indigenous households are currently purchasing (compared with 33 per cent of non-Indigenous households). If you are one of the roughly two thirds renting, you are most likely renting from the state housing authority and paying around \$141.00 per week or about 85 per cent of the median rent paid by non-Indigenous renters. If you are one of the 26 per cent paying off your house, however, your mortgage payments will be of a similar level to those of non-Indigenous home purchasers.

As an Indigenous homeowner or renter your household is also more likely to be crowded. Eleven per cent of Indigenous households in Dubbo have six or more usual residents compared with only three per cent of non-Indigenous households, while the average household size is 3.4 people compared with 2.5 among the broader population. Your household is also much more likely to contain children and, as a parent, your chances of being a single parent are higher. Thirty-six per cent of Indigenous family households fit this category compared with non-Indigenous figures of 10 per cent. Your income is also likely to be comparatively low. Indigenous median individual weekly income in Dubbo is 64 per cent of that of the non-Indigenous level. Household median income is slightly higher at 72 per cent, but this figure does not take into account the larger Indigenous households. It is also reasonably likely, but not as likely as it is for non-Indigenous households, that your household will have an internet connection. Forty-three per cent of Indigenous households are internet-connected compared with 57 per cent of non-Indigenous households.

In and out of the education system

Educationally, as an Aboriginal person, you are likely to be comparatively disadvantaged, even prior to considering that whole-of-population educational levels in Dubbo are below national averages. Although the Indigenous population is youthful the rate of education to year 12 level is only half that of non-Indigenous residents. If a school student, you are probably attending a public school, with 83 per cent of Indigenous secondary students in government schools compared with 54 per cent of non-Indigenous students. If you are aged 18 to 24 you are likely to have left schooling altogether. While a large majority of all youth (aged 18-24 years) in Dubbo are outside the education system, the Indigenous figure (88%) is substantially higher than that for non-Indigenous youth (73%).

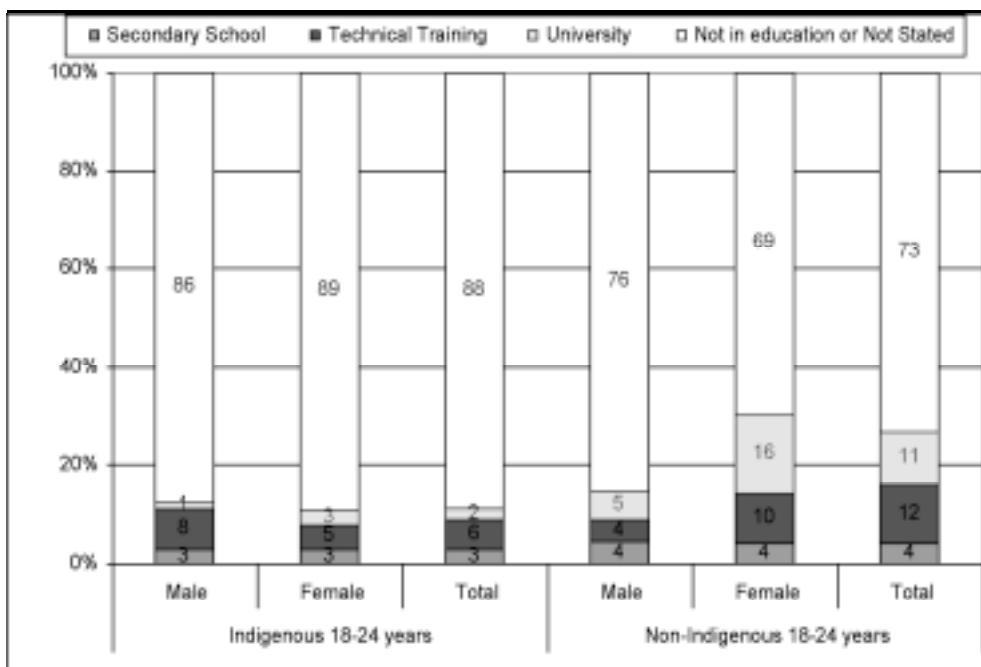
If you are one of the minority still in education after age 18, you are more likely to be in technical than higher education. As shown in Figure 4 below, only two per cent of Indigenous youth (just 10 students) attend university compared with 11 per cent of non-Indigenous youth. This is despite the presence within the town of the Dubbo campus of Charles Sturt University. Figures for those in technical training are less disparate but non-Indigenous youth (12%) are still attending at double the rate (6%) of Indigenous youth. An examination of these data by gender, as shown in Figure 4, finds the ratio of female and male youth participation about the same, with non-Indigenous youth about five times more likely to be attending university. Female youth, however, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are attending in higher numbers than their male counterparts.

These figures are reflected in data relating to level of post-school qualifications. Again, the proportion of people in Dubbo holding a post-school qualification is below the national average (31% compared with 44%) but Indigenous figures fall significantly below even these low rates. As detailed in Figure 5 below, only 12 per cent report any post-school qualification and the inequities are highest at the higher qualification levels. While only two per cent of the non-Indigenous population reports a post-graduate degree or diploma, this is still six times

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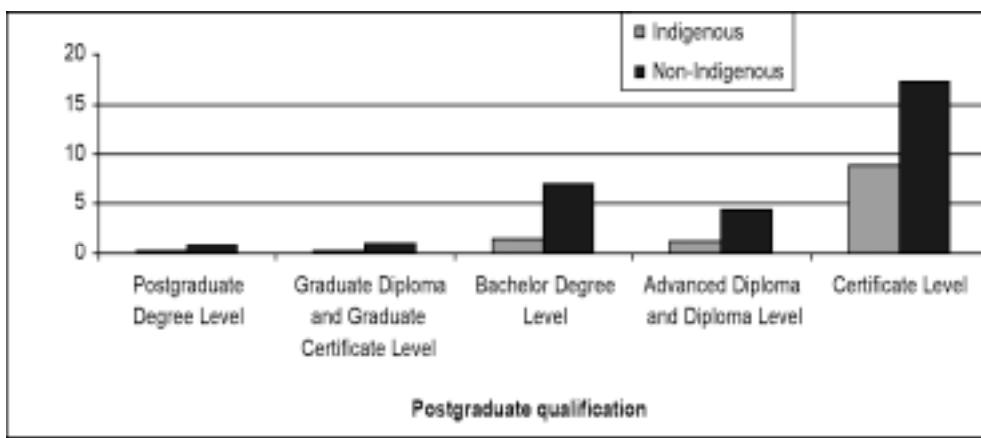
the Indigenous rate (only 10 people). The ratio of non-Indigenous to Indigenous Dubbo residents with a bachelor level qualification is also 6:1, and at the diploma and certificate level the gap drops but remains at twice the level.

Figure 4. Attendance at education institutions by Indigenous status: Dubbo



Those attending university or TAFE and living outside the Dubbo area would not be included in these figures. Small numbers of cases from the 'not stated' and 'other' categories are excluded from this analysis.

Figure 5. Post-school qualification by Indigenous status: Dubbo



Those with level of education not stated or inadequately described, counted as not having a post-school qualification.

Work life in Dubbo

As an Indigenous person living in Dubbo you (or at least someone in your household), are likely to be unemployed. The 2006 Indigenous unemployment rate of 21.9 per cent is more than quadruple the rate of other Dubbo residents. Your household is also more likely to contain people who are outside the labour force. The Indigenous labour market participation rate is 56 per cent of those aged over 15 years compared with 67 per cent of the non-Indigenous residents. Pulling these figures together, just on 44 per cent of Indigenous people in Dubbo aged over 15 years were employed on census night compared with 64 per cent of non-Indigenous residents.

If you are in employment, the picture is more mixed. As an Indigenous worker you are more likely to be in a labouring type position (21%-12%) and less likely to be a manager or professional (17%-29%). However, you have an equal likelihood (15% from both groups) of working as a technical or trade worker and are nearly twice as likely to be employed as a community or personal service worker (17%-9%).

2.3 The diversity of Indigenous lives in Dubbo

The statistical pictures emerging from these data indicate that Indigenous lives in Dubbo are different in significant ways from non-Indigenous lives. The interplay of current circumstances and locational history can be grasped through this analysis. Although Aboriginal residents of the town are no longer confined to the Talbragar Reserve, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Dubbo remain spatially separated across most spheres. The relationship between Aboriginality and being disadvantaged across all the significant socio-economic indicators also remains strong.

Table 1. Dubbo – comparative highest year of school: 2001-2006

Highest Year of Schooling	Indigenous residents		Non-Indigenous residents	
	2001	2006	2001	2006
Year 12 or equivalent	12.9	15.6	29.9	34.3
Year 11	8.1	9.6	5.9	6.8
Year 10	30.1	31.6	36.1	35.6
Year 9 or below	35.8	34.1	20.1	18.8
Still at school	6.7	na	3.8	na
Not stated	6.4	9.3	4.2	4.6
Non-Indigenous to Indigenous year 12 achievement ratio	2.3:1	2.2:1		

Are socio-economic circumstances getting better in Dubbo for Indigenous residents? The 2006 unemployment rate of 21.9 per cent is lower than the 2001 rate of 25.3 per cent, but still well above the national Indigenous figure of 16 per cent. In the same period, however, the unemployment rate for the non-Indigenous population in Dubbo reduced from 6.7 to 5.3 per cent. In relative terms, therefore, the ratio for the Indigenous to non-Indigenous rate rose from 3.8 to 4.1 times. Over the same period the housing picture slightly improved. The proportion

of Indigenous home owners or purchasers increased from 30 to 34 per cent, a rate about the same as the national Indigenous figure (34%), and Indigenous home-ownership increased at a slightly higher rate than among the non-Indigenous population.

Educationally the gap has also narrowed slightly. As shown in Table 1 above, the proportion of the Indigenous population who have completed year 12 or its equivalent rose from 13 to 16 per cent compared with a rise of 30 to 34 per cent for the non-Indigenous population, reducing the ratio from 2.3:1 to 2.2:1. It remains, however, below the national Indigenous rate of 19 per cent. Less positively, given the larger proportion of the Indigenous population at younger ages (19% are aged 15-24 years compared with 14% of the non-Indigenous population), this small increase does not point to the achievement of educational parity even in the longer term.

The combination of these factors: substantially lower levels of household income; substantially lower levels of education; much higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of labour market participation; signifies the continuation of markedly different, rather than simply diverse, lives. Even in the arenas where there has been an absolute and a relative improvement, such as housing tenure and education level, the gap is so wide and the relative improvement so small that it is hard to envisage a time when the two populations in Dubbo will be experiencing anything like the same life options and outcomes.

2.4 Dubbo future directions

Given that the Census data indicates that the Indigenous population in Dubbo is growing at a much faster rate than the non-Indigenous population, resulting in the comparative youth of this population, this level of Indigenous disadvantage is increasingly pressing. Leaving aside contestation from Aboriginal groups in Dubbo of whether the Census accurately reflects Indigenous population numbers (see page 5), figures show that between 2001 and 2006 the Indigenous population grew by 510 people or 15 per cent. In the same period the non-Indigenous population grew by less than one per cent. This means that an increasing proportion of the potential workforce is Indigenous and a continuation of low education levels and high unemployment rates disadvantages the region, not just the Indigenous residents.

There are indications of some progress in this direction. The local *Daily Liberal*¹⁷ reported 72 Aboriginal job seekers had been placed in employment in the previous eight months under the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. The Dubbo City Council's 'A 2020 Vision for the City of Dubbo' lists as 'Strategy 8' (of 9) that as part of the planning it will 'Collaborate with the Aboriginal and multi cultural community in developing partnerships to improve cultural diversity, inclusiveness, employment, education and health outcomes for the City'. The 2011 Census will indicate if this strategy has been successful.

3. Living an Indigenous life in Perth

The 2006 Census puts the Indigenous population of Perth at 21,324 people, around 1.5 per cent of the total population of the city of 1,445,077. Although the Indigenous population contains a proportion of people from the Torres Strait, as well as Aboriginal people from other parts of the nation, a majority are Noongar¹⁸ people, the traditional owners of the land on which Perth and its surroundings sit. As in other places, the Indigenous population of Perth is comparatively very young with 37 per cent aged less than 15 years, double the proportion of the non-Indigenous population. Conversely, only two per cent of Indigenous people in Perth are aged over 65 years compared with 12 per cent of non-Indigenous people.

3.1 Significance and history of place

The Noongar people are a large group, linked by a common language, that traditionally and contemporaneously occupies the south-west corner of Western Australia. The Noongar land of south-western Western Australia contains a number of traditional owners with language groups from the area including the: *Yuat, Kaniyang, Goreng, Minang, Nyaki-Nyaki, Bibbulman, Pindjarup, Wardandi, Wajuk, Wiilman, Ngatjuma, Wudjari, Malpawith, Balardung* and *Kalaamaya*. The Wujak people's area takes in most of present-day Perth. Relations between the different groups were (and are) co-operative and all shared (and many still share) a spirituality based around land and place. Within this spirituality, Waakal, or the Rainbow Serpent, creator of people, land and waterways, features strongly¹⁹.

In Western Australia Aboriginal/European contact occurred as early as the late 1600s, escalating during the early 1800s, especially around the sealing areas near Albany where a military force was stationed. Colonisation, however, and European settlement along the Swan River area, did not occur until 1829. Post-colonisation, the usual pattern of European land usage meant that the Noongar were progressively excluded from their traditional lands and clashes soon began between the new arrivals and the local population. Yagan is the most renowned (but certainly not the only) Noongar resistance fighter through this period. Killed in July 1833, after death his head and skin from his back showing his tribal markings were removed, smoked and taken to England, remaining on public display in Liverpool until 1964. As the result of Noongar lobbying, Yagan's head was repatriated to Perth in 1997.

Despite resistance, dispossession continued and in 1886 Aboriginal people in the region were placed under colonial guardianship. Many were forcibly relocated to settlements such as Carrolup Native Settlement, now known as Marribank, near current day Katanning. The Western Australian *Aborigines Act of 1905* provided the state with sweeping powers over Aboriginal lives in the Perth area as well as others. Among these restrictions, Aboriginal people were forbidden to drink alcohol, could have their property taken from them, could be told where they could and could not live, could be removed from a town and onto a reserve, could be arrested without warrant for any breach of the Aborigines Act, and were excluded from voting. Furthermore, Aboriginal women needed written permission to marry a non-Aboriginal person under the Act. The Chief Protector was also the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children. These restrictions were tightened under the *Aborigines Act of 1936 (WA)*. Under this Act all Aboriginal marriages needed permission and Aboriginal people could be forced to undergo medical examinations. Under 1944 legislation Aboriginal people could apply for certificates of citizenship to escape such control but had to prove that they no longer associated with other Aboriginal people, were free of leprosy and sexually transmitted diseases, had adopted the habits and manners of civilised life, and were industrious and able to speak English²⁰. Although the right to vote was finally extended in 1962, Aboriginal people in Western Australia were still regulated by the *Native Welfare Act 1963 (WA)* and onerous citizenship limiting provisions were not repealed until 1972²¹.

Despite the privations related to colonisation and the subsequent legislative control of their lives, Noongar culture and language remain intact. Noongar people have stayed attached physically and spiritually to their traditional lands and heritage and the current Noongar population actively practises its culture and language.

In 2003, the 218 Indigenous family groups of the Noongar population lodged a land claim with the Federal Court in Perth. This Single Noongar Claim combines other registered and unregistered claims covering the traditional Noongar lands in the south-west corner of Western Australia. On September 19th 2006, the Perth Federal Court ruled that the Noongar people still had a connection with the land and had native title in the metropolitan area of Perth. The decision did not affect current free-hold title, but allowed the Noongar people to

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use the area for traditional purposes such as hunting, and maintaining and preserving important sites²². The Western Australian Government and the Commonwealth Government have since appealed the Noongar native title claim and in April 2008 the Federal Court overturned Justice Wilcox's decision. The matter will now be returned to the Federal Court²³.

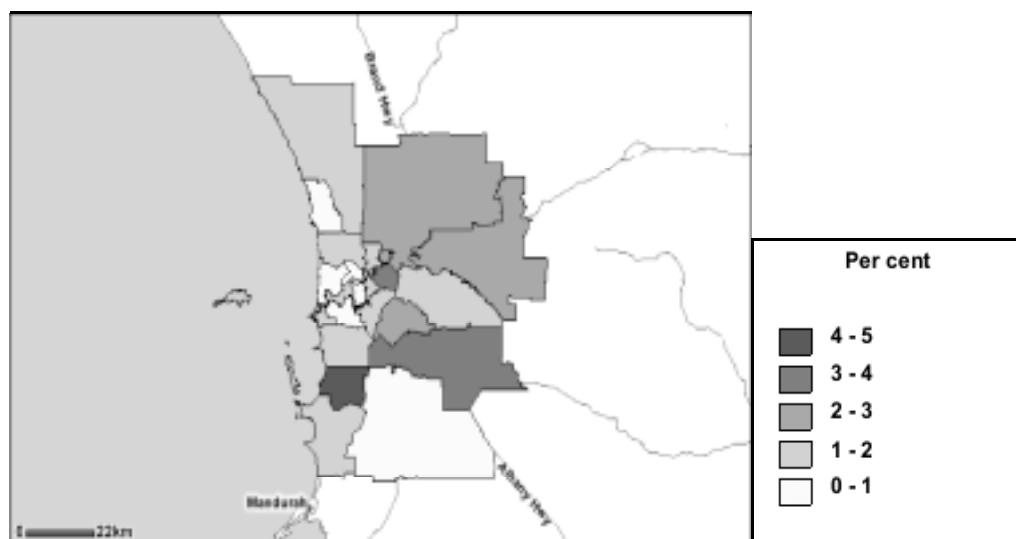
3.2 Life circumstances of place: Perth

The lives of Indigenous people in Perth are similar in some ways to those of Indigenous people in Dubbo but there are also differences. Similarity lies in the age structures of the two populations: both are much younger and different in their overall shape from the age structure of the non-Indigenous population. The median Indigenous age of 20 in Perth is three years older than that in Dubbo, but the chances of being age 65 in both places is similarly low. Differences are also apparent in the patterning of life circumstances across the social and economic indicators found in the 2006 Census. Indigenous people in Perth, as those in Dubbo, occupy a different socio-economic position from that of the non-Indigenous population.

At home in Perth

As can be seen from the map below, the Indigenous population of Perth is concentrated in a number of areas. Around Bassendean, the other southern suburbs and in the Armadale region there are significant numbers of Indigenous people, but the gentrified city areas such as Fremantle, Nedlands and Victoria Park are the home of very few Indigenous residents. Rather, the areas of higher Indigenous residence correlate strongly with areas of lower income and high public housing levels. Most of Perth's Indigenous population lives in lower socio-economic areas. Using a residential index of dissimilarity to indicate levels of spatial separation by race, 46 per cent of Perth Indigenous people would need to move for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to be evenly distributed throughout the city. This result indicates that the level of population segregation is more pronounced in Perth than it is in Dubbo.

Map 2. Perth Indigenous population by usual residence 2006



Source: 2006 Census MapStats; Perth.

In sharp contrast to the non-Indigenous population, most Indigenous people residing in Perth are in rental accommodation. Only eight per cent of Indigenous residents fully own their home and another 30 per cent are purchasing (compared with respective non-Indigenous figures of 30% and 38%). If you are one of the Indigenous majority in rental accommodation, then you will also likely be renting from the public housing authority. The rate of Indigenous public rental is more than triple that of the non-Indigenous population. Your rent at a median of \$150 per week will be lower than the \$180 non-Indigenous median, probably reflecting the imbalance in public over private tenancies between the two groups. You are also more likely to have moved in the past five years. Forty-two per cent of Indigenous households recorded the same address as in the last census, compared with 53 per cent of non-Indigenous households.

As an Indigenous person you are also more likely to be single and never married than non-Indigenous Perth residents. Around 36 per cent of Indigenous people in Perth aged over 15 were partnered at the time of the 2006 Census compared with 49 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. This difference is at least partly explained by the younger age structure of the Indigenous population. However, despite the lower rate of partnering, your household is also much more likely to contain children. Only 15 per cent of Indigenous households are lone-person, compared with 25 per cent of non-Indigenous households, and 85 per cent of Indigenous family households have children, compared with 62 per cent of non-Indigenous households. Compounding this, more than double the number of Perth Indigenous family households are sole-parent households (31%-15%).

Your personal and household weekly income is also likely to be significantly lower. The Indigenous mean individual weekly income (\$327) is just 63 per cent of that of non-Indigenous residents (\$515). Also the Indigenous household median income (\$851) is substantially lower than the non-Indigenous median income (\$1086), although Indigenous household size, on average at 3.3 persons, is higher than the 2.5 person non-Indigenous average. Your household is also much more likely to be crowded, with 12 per cent of Indigenous homes having six or more usual residents compared with three per cent of non-Indigenous homes. Your household might be one of the 42 per cent with internet connections, well below the 65 per cent of connected non-Indigenous households. At home you are also most likely to speak English although around 12 per cent of Indigenous people in Perth also speak an Aboriginal language.

In and out of the education system in Perth

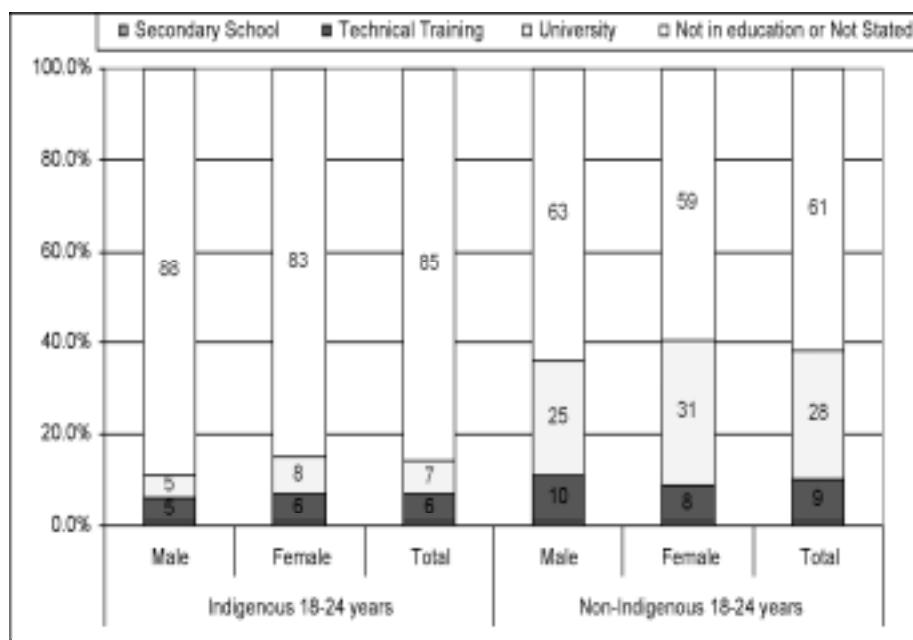
If you have children they are most likely to be attending a government school. Just 22 per cent of Indigenous secondary students are outside the state system compared with 47 per cent of non-Indigenous secondary students. You, or other members of your household, are also unlikely to be educated to year 12 level or its equivalent. Just over 21 per cent of Perth's Indigenous population is educated to year 12 level compared with 49 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. For the majority of Indigenous people in Perth, schooling ceases at year 10 or below.

Post-secondary education rates among youth are also sharply different. As an Indigenous young person in Perth you are very unlikely to be in education after the age of 18. A full 85 per cent of Indigenous youth aged 18-24 years are not in education compared with 61 per cent of non-Indigenous youth. As shown in Figure 6 below, the starkness of the disparity is demonstrated in university attendance figures. While the seven per cent of Indigenous youth (18-24) who attended university in 2006 is much higher than in Dubbo, it is much lower than the comparison rate of 28 per cent for non-Indigenous Perth youth (the gender pattern being similar to Dubbo). This ratio of 4:1 cannot be explained by a lack of higher education facilities:

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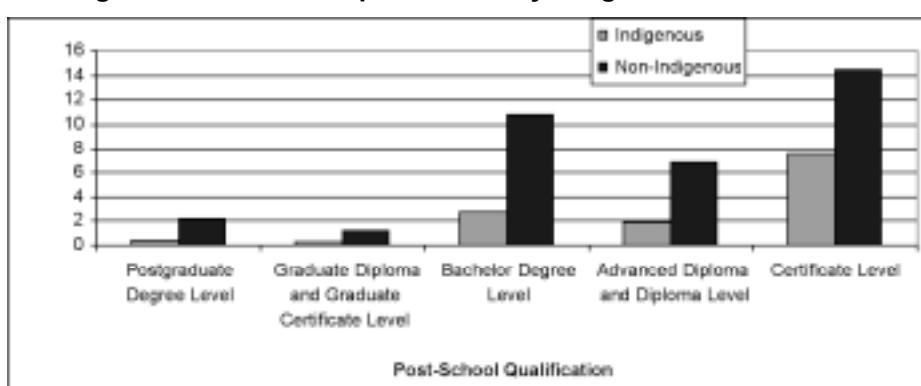
as a young person in Perth you have a wide range of higher education options, including the University of Western Australia, Murdoch University, Curtin, Edith Cowan and the Australian Catholic University. The impact of life chances and likely life outcomes for these two groups of Perth youth is clear. In a similar pattern to youth education in Dubbo, the disparity is not as wide within technical training.

Figure 6. Attendance at educational institutions by Indigenous status: Perth



Those attending university or TAFE and living outside Perth would not be included in these figures. Small numbers of cases from the 'not stated' and 'other' categories are excluded from this analysis.

Figure 7. Post-school qualification by Indigenous status: Perth



Those with level of education not stated or inadequately described, counted as not having a post-school qualification.

This disparity is mirrored in other education figures. As an Indigenous Perth resident you are less than half as likely to report a post-school qualification as a non-Indigenous resident (13%-36%). Examining the level and dispersion of qualifications finds the largest gaps in the higher qualification end. This pattern is found in Figure 7 above.

Comparing non-Indigenous with Indigenous figures, for post-graduate degree or certificate the ratio is 6:1; for bachelor degrees and advanced diplomas the ratio is around 4:1; and 2:1 for certificate-level qualifications.

Work life in Perth

As an Indigenous person in Perth your chances of being unemployed, or outside the labour force, are high. Despite the booming Western Australian economy, on Census night of August 2006 the Indigenous unemployment rate stood at 16.1 per cent, four and a half times the non-Indigenous rate of 3.6 per cent. Again, these already worrisome figures underestimate the full situation. The non-Indigenous labour market participation rate is 64 per cent compared with just 51 per cent for the Indigenous population. The comparatively low proportion of Indigenous people aged over 60 years (2%-17%) means that most of this group are of working age, but outside the labour market for reasons such as personal ill-health or caring responsibilities, either for children or sick or disabled partners. Adding those not in the labour force to those unemployed, a staggering 65 per cent of the Indigenous population is not in employment compared with just 36 per cent of non-Indigenous Perth residents.

If you are one of the minority in employment you are more likely to be working in a lower level occupation. In a similar pattern to the profile of the Dubbo Indigenous workforce you are less likely to be a manager or professional worker than your non-Indigenous counterparts (19%-32%) and more likely to be either a labourer, machinery operator or driver (26%-16%), or a community or personal care worker (15%-9%). You are roughly equally likely to be employed as a technical or trade, clerical or sales worker. Although the 2006 Census figures do not allow a reliable estimate of the comparative proportions of the workforces in public or private sector employment²⁴, an analysis of employment by industry suggests that Indigenous workers in Perth are over-represented in the public sector. Forty-two per cent of the Indigenous workforce is employed in service and support industries compared with 33 per cent of the non-Indigenous workforce.

3.3 The diversity of Indigenous lives in Perth

In comparison with national Indigenous figures, an Indigenous resident of Perth is less likely to fully own their own home (national 35%), shares the same unemployment rate of 16 per cent, is slightly more likely to have completed grade 12 (national 19%), but is less likely to hold a bachelor degree (national 4%) and has a higher median weekly individual income (national \$278 per week).

In terms of intercensal absolute and relative socio-economic improvement, the picture in Perth is mixed. While Indigenous absolute income went up between 2001 and 2006, in relative terms the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous individual median income dropped from 68.6 to 63.5 per cent. As with all such statistics a number of social and economic factors likely contributed to this relative rise in income inequality. The strong Western Australian economy seems to have benefited non-Indigenous workers to a greater extent through unprecedented high employment levels and higher wages. While Indigenous unemployment also decreased, again this decrease is only in absolute terms. The Indigenous unemployment rate dropped from 27.5 per cent to 16.1 per cent, while the non-Indigenous rate dropped from 7.7 per cent to 3.6 per cent. In ratio terms the Indigenous unemployment rate is now 4.5 times that of the non-Indigenous rate in 2006 compared with 3.6 times in 2001.

Table 2. Perth – comparative highest year of school: 2001 and 2006

Highest Year of Schooling	Indigenous Residents		Non-Indigenous residents	
	2001	2006	2001	2006
Year 12 or equivalent	20.2	21.3	44.0	49.1
Year 11	12.2	13.3	10.7	11.1
Year 10	33.0	30.3	27.1	24.3
Year 9 or below	23.4	16.5	13.2	9.7
Did not go to school	1.7	1.2	0.8	0.7
Not stated	9.5	17.4	4.2	5.1
Non-Indigenous to Indigenous Year 12 Achievement Ratio	2.2:1	2.3:1		

Similarly as shown in Table 2, absolute increases in levels of education are countered by relative increases in the educational gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. While, in 2006, an additional 461 Indigenous Perth residents reported that their highest level of schooling was year 12 or its equivalent – a 19.3 per cent increase over 2001 – the comparative proportion of Indigenous residents with year 12 declined slightly relative to non-Indigenous residents.

Similarly, the difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in terms of post-graduate qualifications widened between 2001 and 2006. Indigenous residents of Perth are both better qualified and further behind their non-Indigenous co-residents. That is, even though more Indigenous people held post-graduate qualifications in 2006, the rate of increase is lower than that of the non-Indigenous population.

3.4 Perth future directions

Although Indigenous people in Perth remain very much a minority, their population is growing. And the socio-economic profile of that population remains distinctively and disadvantageously different to that of the non-Indigenous population across all dimensions. The intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives, lived alongside each other within the Perth city boundaries, appears from the data in this study to be both spatially and socially disconnected. It is also obvious from these data that closing the gap, an issue now rising in prominence within both state and federal Indigenous-related social policy, needs to be considered for capital cities such as Perth as well as in remote and/or discrete Indigenous towns and communities.

The outcome of the Noongar Single Claim for native title will have special impact on Perth's Indigenous population. The Noongar claim is essentially about achieving recognition of Noongar place, belonging and ownership from the non-Indigenous population and social and political institutions; the Noongar people themselves already know they belong. And while the effect on the day-to-day lives of Perth's Indigenous and non-Indigenous population will be largely symbolic, with predominantly cultural outcomes, the impact on Indigenous lives in

Perth of such broader social recognition of the importance and legitimacy of place to the Noongar people should not be underestimated.

4. Living an Indigenous life in Maningrida

Maningrida sits on the North Central Arnhem Land coast near the mouth of the Liverpool River. The traditional owners of the land where the town is situated are the *Kunbidji* people. Maningrida's history as a former trading and rations post and Welfare Department Indigenous settlement means that other clan groups, including the *Kunbarlang*, *Nakkara*, *Burarra*, *Gunnartpa*, *Gurrongi*, *Rembarrnga*, *Eastern Kunwinjku*, *Djinang*, *Wurlaki* and *Gupapuyngu* peoples also live in the area²⁵. Over 10 languages are spoken and more than 95 per cent of the Indigenous population reports speaking an Aboriginal language at home.

The town's population was 2068 on Census night in 2006. More than 90 per cent is Indigenous and Maningrida is the second largest Indigenous town in the Northern Territory after Wadeye. In a parallel pattern to that seen in Dubbo and Perth, the population of Maningrida is young. The median age is 20 years and 45 per cent of the Indigenous population is aged less than 19 years. Similarly, the proportion of older people is small. Only 2.1 per cent of the Indigenous population of Maningrida is aged 65 years and over. Collecting census data in communities such as Maningrida is challenging. For example, Martin and colleagues²⁶ highlighted the unique difficulties for both the ABS and Indigenous people in remote communities such as Maningrida of participating in the 2001 Census. Accurate enumeration especially is difficult given the fluidity of households. The mismatch between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of concepts such as age, previous addresses, family structure and socio-economic characteristics also undermines the reliability of some data collected.

4.1 Significance and history of place

Legislative control of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory was comparable to that enacted in the southern states, but began later, in line with later European settlement. *The Aboriginals Ordinance Act 1918* (NT) gave the Northern Territory's Chief Protector of Aborigines control of Aboriginal children, the power to force Aboriginal people to live on designated reserves and regulate Aboriginal employment and presence in towns, especially after dark. Aboriginal people were excluded from voting and from being in any areas declared 'prohibited'. These regulatory powers continued to be exercised through the 1950s and 1960s. The vast majority of Aboriginal people in the Territory were legally regarded as wards of the state and were unable to marry without permission or conduct business in their own right. Aboriginal workers could also have their wages directed to a third person even though Aboriginal pastoral worker wages were only about one fifth that of non-Indigenous workers. The right to vote was extended to the Territory's Aboriginal population in 1962 in line with Commonwealth legislation, but the *Aboriginals Ordinance Act* was not repealed until 1971, nearly a decade later²⁷.

Maningrida, as a town, began as a trading and rations post in 1947 under the Commonwealth Department of Native Affairs, becoming a permanent Welfare Department settlement in 1958. The town's name originates from the *Kunibidji* name *Manayingkarírra*, from the phrase meaning 'the place where the dreaming changed shape'. The town's current facilities include a community health centre, a school with grades from pre-school to grade 12 (secondary education only became available in 2003), a Centrelink office, a police station, a Rural Transactions Centre that provides government and other services such as post, banking and

Lives of Diversity: Indigenous Australians

community internet and business facilities, and a women's centre. Power for the town is generated from a diesel power station²⁸.

Maningrida sits on Aboriginal land. The Federal *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* gave the Aboriginal people in the Maningrida region inalienable freehold title to their lands. Aboriginal land ownership in the area is regulated by clan affinity and, although currently under review, a permit from the Northern Land Council is still needed before outsiders can enter the area. Maningrida is also a 'dry' town restricted under the Northern Territory Liquor Act. This means that individuals need a permit from the Northern Territory Licensing Commission to bring alcohol into town, with the amount, type and consumption practices regulated within this permit. This does not mean that alcohol abuse does not occur in Maningrida or that all alcohol brought into the area is approved. The Maningrida Council website also notes that Kava and marijuana consumption are problematic, despite the use and possession of both of these substances being unlawful within the town.

Maningrida is one of the 73 Aboriginal towns directly affected by *The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 (Cth)*. This Act, more commonly known as the NT Intervention, came into effect in July 2007 as the Howard Government's response to the 2007 Anderson and Wild 'The Little Children are Sacred' report into child abuse within Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The NT Intervention process enabled under this Act compulsorily acquires the town's lease for five years for the Federal Government. Other measures include broad-scale health checks for children, a review of the Aboriginal land permit system, the quarantining of half or more of Indigenous residents' welfare payments, and the closing down of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) to allow such quarantining to be implemented.

The Maningrida traditional owners and the Bawinanga Corporation are currently challenging the validity of the takeover of the town's lease in the High Court on the basis that the property was not acquired by the Commonwealth on just terms. The concern focuses on the need to protect sacred sites, traditional hunting and gathering rights and the assets of the community and its organisations. At the time of writing this case is still before the High Court.

4.2 Life circumstances of place: Maningrida

Living an Indigenous life in Maningrida is locationally very different to that in either Dubbo or Perth. Maningrida is situated 500 kilometres east of Darwin and it takes at least seven hours to travel from Darwin to Maningrida by road. As road access is limited during the wet season from December to May much of the transport in and out of Maningrida is, necessarily, by air. There are two flights daily from Darwin on weekdays and one each day on weekends. This remoteness, with its attendant limited economic opportunities, exacerbates the already significant socio-economic disadvantage of the town's residents. The economy of Maningrida is largely reliant on income support payments and federal and territory funding. The Maningrida Council estimates that around \$400,000 per fortnight in income support payments comes into Maningrida and its surrounding outstations. The town also has several private enterprises including a community store, a fishing venture and a motel.

At home in Maningrida

Life at home at Maningrida is crowded. More than 90 per cent of Indigenous households have six or more usual residents. While housing renovations and upgrades are undertaken by the Council, along with the construction of some new properties, these initiatives are not nearly enough to remedy the current chronic overcrowding. Census 2006 figures put the average number of residents per Indigenous household at 9.6 persons, but the Maningrida Council cites housing occupation rates of 15.2 persons per house. In contrast the average

occupancy of Maningrida non-Indigenous households in 1.9 persons per house. Either way, whether the occupancy rate is 10 or 15 per house, such overcrowding has obvious health, living-conditions and quality-of-life implications for the Indigenous population.

As an Indigenous person in Maningrida your household is most likely renting from the housing co-operative. Most of the population lives in one of the 57 community houses with a rental of \$20 per week per person. Only ten Indigenous households own their homes and there were no households purchasing their homes in 2006.

Given the very high numbers of people resident in each Maningrida house, you are also likely to be living in a multiple-family household. Two thirds of Indigenous households in Maningrida are multiple-family households and the rest are family-with-children households. There are no lone-person Indigenous households in Maningrida. Your household is also unlikely to have internet access. Only seven per cent of Indigenous households have an internet connection. This low figure is not related to the remoteness of the community and related inaccessibility of the internet because 74 per cent of the 65 non-Indigenous households report an internet connection. You, and your household, are also living on a low income. Median weekly individual income is only \$210 per week, significantly lower than in either Dubbo or Perth, and a sharp contrast to that of non-Indigenous residents (\$981 per week). Median household income is more comparable (\$1264 and \$1350 per week) but such comparisons ignore the gross differences in household occupancy rates.

In and out of the education system in Maningrida

As an Indigenous Maningrida resident your chances of having a full secondary education are very slim. Only five per cent of the Indigenous population is educated to year 12 or its equivalent. These figures are put into perspective by the fact that until 2003, despite a secondary school age (12-18 years) population of more than 300 young people, there was no high school in Maningrida. The first four grade 12 students did not graduate until 2005²⁹. Before the opening of the high school, young Indigenous people either could not go on to a full secondary education or needed to board in Darwin or other cities in order to do so. As the Indigenous median income data for Maningrida suggests, this 'option' was not and is not within the financial realm of the vast majority of Indigenous residents.

Although Council figures indicate more than 800 enrolments at the Maningrida Community Education Centre, these numbers are not replicated in the 2006 Census data. Only 104 students are listed as being at secondary school, a third of those in the 12 to 18 year age group, and this represents only half the numbers of Indigenous young people aged 12 to 16 years. There is less discrepancy in the primary school student numbers but even here the number (347) of children aged 5 to 11 listed as enrolled by Council is significantly higher than the 207 recorded as attending an infant or primary school in the 2006 Census data. The inferences to be drawn from these figures are muddied to some degree by the complicating Indigenous data collection and accuracy issues. It is impossible to tell from the data alone whether the cultural and language factors identified by Martin et al³⁰, as undermining the reliability of remote area Indigenous data, are at play here. This mismatch between the number of children in the town and the number recorded as attending primary and secondary school could be due to such difficulties. Regardless, it is still reasonable to deduce that there are school attendance issues among the town's children.

As an Indigenous resident of Maningrida your chances of being a current tertiary student or graduate are even slimmer. With a high school only a very recent acquisition, Maningrida obviously does not have a university or technical campus within the town, but students can access technical and higher education via block release format from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Post-school education figures are, however, single digit only.

Lives of Diversity: Indigenous Australians

There are three people aged 15 to 24 years categorised as full-time university students (there are no part-time or older students) and four students counted as participating part-time in technical and further education. In line with these figures, the level of post-school qualifications reported in Maningrida is low. Just three Indigenous people report holding a post-graduate diploma or certificate, another three a bachelor degree and a further three an advanced diploma. Qualifications to the certificate level are more numerous with 44 people reporting certificate-level qualifications. Roughly two-thirds of this group hold the higher level certificates 3 and 4. If you are among the very few with a post-school qualification your qualification is mostly likely to be in the fields of education, health or society and culture, which make up more than 50 per cent of such qualifications. Although these post-school qualification levels are desperately low by national standards, given the lack of educational facilities and options in Maningrida, they probably represent a significant achievement.

Work life in Maningrida

As an Indigenous worker in Maningrida in 2006 work primarily means (or meant – see below) participating in the CDEP scheme. If you are one of the 314 people listed as employed, it is more likely that you will be one of the 253 CDEP participants rather than in a wage-paying position. The administrative practice of counting CDEP participants as employed results in more than 80 per cent of those listed as employed actually working for welfare payments via this scheme. This conclusion is supported by weekly income figures which put 93 per cent of Indigenous incomes at under \$400 per week (and 68% under \$250 per week). These data throw a very different light on the official unemployment rate for Maningrida of 16.4 per cent. This is magnified if we consider that these figures also only apply to the 35 per cent of the Indigenous population qualifying as labour market participants. Around two thirds of Maningrida's Indigenous population aged over 15 years is classified as 'not in the labour force' within the 2006 Census. The combined reality of this labour market data is that overall, of a population of 1203 aged 15 years and over, only 61 individuals, or 5 per cent of the Indigenous population of Maningrida, are in paid, standard employment. This deduction is supported by data around hours worked which show that only 65 Indigenous workers in Maningrida work more than 24 hours per week.

As an Indigenous worker in Maningrida (CDEP or otherwise) your range of employment options are also circumscribed. Nearly 90 per cent of those with an industry sector nominated work in one of just three areas: administration or safety (43%); education and training (10%); or health care and social assistance (36%). These concentrations of employment options are reflected in the occupational figures, where more than one quarter of workers are listed as labourers or machinery operators, a further one quarter as clerical or community and personal service workers, and just 11 per cent as managers or professionals (with another quarter of workers listed in the 'inadequately described/not stated category'). This does not mean that there are no managerial or professional jobs available in the town, as more than half of the 125 non-Indigenous workers in Maningrida are in such occupations.

What work means in Maningrida is now also a contentious and political issue. The CDEP program in Maningrida did not survive the Northern Territory intervention. Prior to the intervention, Maningrida CDEP workers were employed in the mud brick factory, in the Bawinanga Corporation's Supermarket, at the Arts Centre and at the Aged Care Centre, among other places within the town³¹. This change has had both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, some of the former CDEP positions will translate into regular waged positions. On the negative side, the number of positions will be far, far fewer than under the CDEP and some activities will just fold, rather than result in the creation of jobs.

4.3 The diversity of Indigenous lives in Maningrida

Indigenous life differs in significant ways from both the lives of the non-Indigenous population of the town and from Indigenous lives lived in other locations. The most obvious difference is in the underlying dimensions of the spatial and social intersection of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Unlike Dubbo and Perth, Maningrida is not a place shared by the two populations; rather it is a predominantly Indigenous town on Indigenous land. As such, the reasons the non-Indigenous population resides there, usually temporarily, are occupational. Most are there because they are employed in positions that provide services to the Indigenous population. From this view, these populations are not really comparable across census data dimensions. The remoteness of Maningrida from major population centres in the Northern Territory, its low levels of basic infrastructure, its difficult history as an Aboriginal Welfare Department settlement and its contentious present and future as part of the NT Intervention into Aboriginal communities, exacerbate the already significant differences between the two population groups.

It is difficult to even pose the question as to whether the socio-economic and life options and chances of the Indigenous people of Maningrida are improving. The depth of social, educational and economic disadvantage is so profound that the term 'improvement' effectively loses its meaning. Yes, absolute income has risen but the tiny proportion of the Indigenous population in waged employment means that the level of personal and household income in Maningrida is fundamentally tied to the level of Centrelink payments, rather than any labour market dimensions. The same limitations apply to any examination of intercensal unemployment data, although the number of Indigenous workers in non-CDEP employment does appear to have risen³². The number of Indigenous residents with post-school qualifications and the level of those qualifications is also higher in 2006 than it was in 2001. The provision of educational facilities to year 12 in 2003 is an encouraging development, underpinning, no doubt, the rise of the proportion of the population educated to this level from 3.5 per cent in 2001 to 5.3 per cent in 2006. The lack of such facilities in Maningrida before 2003, given the age profile, seems incomprehensible.

The largest intercensal change is in the size of the Indigenous population. The population grew from 1366 to 1904 (539 extra people) between 2001 and 2006. This is an increase of 40 per cent. This population growth can be attributed to natural increase and migration. The numbers of children aged 0 to 14 increased from 538 to 701 and household numbers also increased from 113 to 152. A simple division of the population growth by the extra number of households finds that more than 14 occupants will need to be housed in each of these extra households or be substantially absorbed into households existing since 2001. This extra heavy call on town infrastructure can only exacerbate the already very poor conditions for Maningrida residents. Planned housing developments (see below) will not alleviate the immediate inadequacy of basic living conditions in the short or even medium term.

4.4 Maningrida future directions

As well as being a prescribed area under the Commonwealth NT Intervention, Maningrida is part of the 2008 NT local government reforms. From 1 July 2008 multiple community local governments are being amalgamated into nine shires, with Maningrida included in the Western Arnhem Shire along with the mining town of Jabiru. How this will affect services, infrastructure and facilities for the people of Maningrida is yet to be seen³³. This reform, and its attendant alteration in service provision, delivery and governance and the on-going outcomes and processes inherent in the NT intervention process, will undoubtedly presage very significant change in and for the lives of the Indigenous people of Maningrida.

Maningrida was also recently named as one of the 16 Northern Territory communities that will receive major capital works in a joint housing program between the Federal and Territory Governments of over \$600 million over the next four years³⁴. Work is due to begin in October 2008, although the Northern Territory Government budget details indicate that new building work will not start until at least 2009³⁵. Data from the 2011 Census will provide perhaps the first broad-scale indication of the dimensions, size and directions of these changes.

5. Answering the questions: a paradox of parallel diversities

Two somewhat contradictory answers to this essay's defining questions can be drawn from this analysis of Census 2006 data. In relation to the first question – the diversity between Indigenous lives – there are visible differences across the Census dimensions between Indigenous populations living in different locations. With regard to the second question – how Indigenous lives, lived across different categories of place, compare with those of non-Indigenous people in the same locations – an overwhelming difference is apparent. Extending well beyond population age differentials this cross-population comparative diversity is distinguished by a rigid pattern of Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage across locations. In short, the answer to this essay's overarching questions is that, compared with non-Indigenous lives, the diversity of Indigenous lives, while tangible, is limited and confined within parallel burdens of disadvantage and separation.

5.1 Diversity within and between lives

Examining locational data on the shape and context of diversity of lives between specific Indigenous populations, it is obvious that place matters. Living a Noongar life in Perth differs from living a Wiradjuri/Tubbagah life in Dubbo or a Kunbidji life in Maningrida. And this diversity is embedded in the locationally centred identity of these particular groups as Indigenous peoples. The what, how and why of the history that sits behind how these groups of Indigenous people come to be living in these places at these particular times and in what circumstances is as crucial an element as the life situation of where and how they now live.

Macro consistencies sit above these place-related micro diversities. All three Indigenous populations live in the same geographic space as their ancestors and all three have in recent times reasserted the legitimacy of their belonging to that place. The outcomes, however, vary. The Tubbagah people in Dubbo have received only very limited recognition of their rights to place in their shared agreement on the 16 hectare Terramungamine Reserve. In Maningrida, freehold title was acknowledged in 1976 through a Federal Government Act, but in 2007 the leasehold to the town was compulsorily acquired also via a Federal Government Act. For the Noongar people of Perth the struggle for recognition of their traditional and contemporary ownership of their land continues its tortuous path through the Federal Court. All three also share a history of colonisation and dispossession from land and legislative control of their lives. The regulatory, spatial, cultural and lived experience consequences of this history continued to directly impact on Indigenous lives in all three places well into the 20th century. But how these consequences are manifested and how they are shaped and continue to shape and resonate across Indigenous lives in each place today differs.

The Indigenous population of Maningrida forms the majority population in their traditional country, while that in Dubbo occupies a traditional place alongside a majority of non-Indigenous residents. In Perth, the Indigenous population forms only a tiny minority within a metropolitan population of more than one million. These differing population balances and locational proximities also shape and create different contexts for Indigenous lives lived within these places.

The 2006 Census data reflects these different lived experiences by place. As shown in Table 3 below, Indigenous people in Perth are more likely to own their own home, be educated to year 12, be in education between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age, and have a higher weekly income than those in Dubbo or Maningrida. Indigenous people in Dubbo, on the other hand, are likely to be younger than those from Perth or Maningrida and are more likely to be participating in the labour market, even though they retain a higher level of unemployment. In Maningrida, homeownership, education levels across all spheres, and median income are obviously differently constructed. These factors also place different parameters around the lives of the Indigenous population of Maningrida compared with those of Perth or Dubbo.

Table 3. Indigenous figures by location and national population figures

Indicator	Dubbo Indigenous	Perth Indigenous	Maningrida Indigenous	National Indigenous	National Population
Aged > 15 years	42.4	37.4	36.8	37.6	19.8
Aged < 65 years	2.9	2.2	2.1	3.3	13.3
Median age	17	20	20	20	37
Owner/purchaser	33.9	37.6	6.5	34.1	64.8
Renter	62.0	55.5	90.3	60.2	27.2
Household with 6+ usual occupants	11.3	11.5	92.1	12.0	3.1
Educated to year 12	15.6	21.3	5.3	19.4	44.9
Post-school qualifications	12.0	13.0	2.6	20.0	44.0
In education 18-24 years	12.4	14.6	na	14.6	39.5
Unemployment rate	21.9	16.1	16.4	15.6	5.2
Labour market participation rate	56.3	51.1	44.7	54.5	64.6
Median weekly individual income	\$306	\$327	\$209	\$278	\$466

This diversity between Indigenous people in difference places is, however, of far less significance than the patterns and trends of life circumstances across place. As also shown in Table 3 there is a relentless correspondence between the Indigenous comparative census data by location. The proportion of each population within older and younger age groups retains a remarkable consistency. In all three locations the proportion of young people within the three populations is roughly double that of the non-Indigenous population and the proportion of older people less than 25 per cent of non-Indigenous proportions. But the most striking picture evident in this table is the endurance of the negative similarities. In all three locations the diversity of Indigenous lives is largely overridden by the consistencies of socio-economic hierarchical position, regardless of geographic location. While differences in

absolute figures between place can be observed, the comparative relative patterns persist across the core census dimensions.

Indigenous homeownership in Perth and Dubbo, even taking into account those purchasing, is around half that of the non-Indigenous population. Similarly, the proportion of renters is more than double in both locations, much in public housing, and the level of overcrowding is at least four times non-Indigenous figures. In Maningrida the figures revealing low homeownership and high levels of overcrowding are much starker, but the same pattern is evident.

Educationally, the same chasm is seen between the three populations and their non-Indigenous locational counterparts across all the Census education indicators. The low comparative population proportions with post-school qualifications and of youth in full time education between Perth and Dubbo correlate strongly. More worryingly these correlations not only illuminate past patterns, as in the tiny proportion with post-school qualifications, but also reflect the current education participation and outcomes of Indigenous youth.

The labour market results are perhaps even more dire. Indigenous people in all three locations experience high levels of unemployment and low levels of labour market participation, despite record low levels of unemployment in the non-Indigenous population in these locations and within the nation. There is no evidence here of a flow-on of Australia's prosperity and virtual full employment to its Indigenous people. The prospect of a significant economic downturn makes the likelihood of even greater levels of disadvantage a real possibility.

Overall, it is apparent that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians reside in different demographic and socio-economic realms. Reflecting the education, economic and home-ownership data, the median income of Indigenous people across place is well below that of the non-Indigenous population. And the locational interpretive framework makes it clear that this separation exists regardless of geographic location, history or the broader population's social and economic indicators of place.

5.2 Closing the gaps?

While the robustness of the pattern of disparity is devastatingly clear, the critical question is whether this gap is closing, either within place or more broadly within the nation. Answering this question is not straightforward. For example, is improvement to be measured in absolute or relative terms; that is improvement in Indigenous indicators per se or improvement in relative comparison to non-Indigenous outcomes? This absolute versus relative point has been made by Altman and colleagues³⁶ in examinations of census data from 1971 onwards. Consistent with Altman's results, the locational analysis in this essay demonstrates that 'results' can and do vary, depending on whether the focus is on exploring absolute or relative change.

The present terminology of 'closing the gap' policy objectives indicates that it is relative improvement that is sought, rather than absolute change per se. This makes social and lived reality sense. If the circumstances of one group of citizens are changing positively, but at a slower rate than those of others, such 'improvement' is really just a euphemism for deepening disadvantage. Under such circumstances any automatic or 'pipeline effect', whereby gains gradually work their way through the system, is not a possibility. This point is underlined by Altman, Biddle and Hunter³⁷ in their estimate that on current indicators parity will not be achieved between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations for hundreds of years and, in the case of median household income, for more than 2000 years!

Census 2006, from this perspective, finds that the relative position of Indigenous people in all locations is not consistently altering in a positive direction. As can be seen from Table 4 below, while in some arenas and locations the relative gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations reduced between 2001 and 2006, in others it widened. The specific locational aspects of Maningrida severely limit the usefulness of such an analysis, so only Dubbo and Perth can be compared here across dimensions, census periods and populations. For Perth the comparative ratios on age reduced a little between 2001 and 2006 for both the proportion of the population aged under 15 years and the proportion aged 65 years or over. In Dubbo, however, little change is evident.

The crucial socio-economic indicators are more mixed. In both locations the proportion of owners/purchasers has become relatively more alike, although this change is slight. Household overcrowding ratios have decreased slightly in Dubbo but stayed roughly the same in Perth. The ratio gap increased slightly in Perth and reduced slightly in Dubbo in educated-to-year-12 figures. But in both locations relative improvement can be observed in the proportions holding a bachelor degree. Less positively the unemployment ratio in each place has increased, as has the ratio between median weekly individual incomes. The overall picture, therefore, is one of minimal change, with some very slight gains in closing the gap around housing tenure and education, but a widening of the gap across economic factors such as employment and income. And within this picture, the population age differentials between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations compound the socio-economic differences.

Table 4. Relative change by location

Non-Indigenous/Indigenous Ratio	Dubbo 2001	Dubbo 2006	Perth 2001	Perth 2006
Aged < 15 years	.57:1	.56:1	.51:1	.52:1
Aged > 65 years	4.6:1	4.4:1	6.3:1	5.5:1
Owner/purchaser	1.7:1	1.6:1	1.9:1	1.8:1
Household > 5 usual occupants	0.2:1	0.3:1	0.2:1	0.2:1
Educated to year 12 +	2.3:1	2.2:1	2.2:1	2.3:1
With a bachelor degree	6.1:1	4.9:1	4.3:1	4.0:1
Unemployment rate	3.8:1	4.1:1	3.6:1	4.5:1
Median weekly individual income	0.67	0.63	0.69	0.64

Closing the gap within differing age, social and economic realities

However, this comparison across location and time is even more complex than might at first appear. Different population profiles and different social and economic milieus entangle direct comparisons of Indigenous populations with non-Indigenous populations in a raft of interpretative complications. These throw into sharp relief the difficulties and uncertainties inherent in current policies aimed at closing the gap. Defining 'success' is a knotty task.

Essential pre-requisites include defining exactly what is meant by ‘closing the gap’ via predetermining measurements to account for demographic and social and economic realities. Foremost among these is that differing age structure exposes the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations to different levels of likelihood of different outcomes. Analyses of social and economic data have age group dimensions and these need to be (but are often not) included in interpretations of ‘Improvements’ or indeed ‘declines’ in Indigenous positions³⁸.

Education, as a keystone of efforts to close the life opportunities and outcomes gap, demonstrates how age profiles affect comparative interpretations. Relative year 12 achievement data is the clearest example. Here its youthful profile means the Indigenous population has a proportionately larger group in the age range likely to complete year 12 in any given year. This means that overall rates of year 12 achievement among the Indigenous population should be rising faster than in the older non-Indigenous population. Nationally, and locationally, this is not the case. While the absolute proportion of Australian Indigenous people educated to year 12 equivalent rose one per centage point, in relative terms the year 12 education ratio of non-Indigenous to Indigenous rose in 2006 (2.35:1-2.54:1). A similar picture is found locationally. A higher proportion of the Perth Indigenous population (13%) passed through the peak grade 12 ages of 17 to 18 in the period 2001 to 2006 than the non-Indigenous population (8%). Yet the relative ratio of this indicator increased. Interpreting these results is not just about realising that Indigenous year 12 results are relatively decreasing, even though increasing in absolute terms. The age group aspect means that this educational gap represents a much starker and deeper disparity than the comparative data would suggest. Conversely, as well as indicating fundamental disparities in qualification levels, comparative post-school qualification rates may reflect the longer period that the older non-Indigenous population has had post-school to acquire such qualifications.

Interpreting Indigenous unemployment data is also complicated by social and policy factors. Indigenous unemployment figures, nationally and locationally, are actually worse than they seem for two reasons. First, Indigenous people employed on Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) are counted as ‘employed’ even though these jobs are part-time, casual and linked to welfare payments. CDEP is basically an Indigenous ‘work for the dole’ program which has been operating since 1977³⁹. While CDEP was significantly wound back in 2007 it was still a significant factor in 2006 and it is not possible to disaggregate those on CDEP from those in wage-paying employment in the 2006 data. But its influence is not insubstantial. In the 2001 Census 32,000 Indigenous ‘workers’ were actually CDEP participants, accounting for up to 20 per cent of Indigenous male employment.

Second, the labour force participation rate of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over is considerably lower than that of the non-Indigenous population (51%-65%). And while many of the non-Indigenous ‘not in the labour force’ population is likely to be above retirement age, the small proportion of the Indigenous population aged 65 years or more means that most of this group is of working age and out of the labour force for disability, caring and other reasons not related to age. The unemployment rate of the Indigenous population, therefore, despite being already disproportionately high, is kept lower, somewhat artificially, by the inclusion of ‘CDEP workers’ and the high rates of non-participation among working age adults.

5.3 Conclusions: lives structured within parallel spaces?

Answering this essay’s two basic questions – the diversity between and within Indigenous lives – foregrounds two further unresolved and interwoven questions. The first is how can we explain this shared Indigenous socio-economic space? While such a question cannot be unequivocally answered from census data, explanatory propositions do suggest themselves.

First, the parallels of place are central. Being an Indigenous person in Australia today is statistically related to a common position on the lowest rung of society's socio-economic hierarchy. There is an Indigenous-specific location fundamentally related to poverty and exclusion.

This is not an essentialist argument. The consistency of this pattern across place, time and Indigenous peoples, regardless of family, cultural, country and colonising history, demonstrates that this shared Indigenous place is located socially and economically. It is an Indigenous domain, an embedded hierarchical positioning of Indigenous peoples across Australian society, not a trait of individual Indigenous people or peoples. As the analysis demonstrates, there are broad social, economic and spatial separations between the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across urban, regional and other locations.

Socially, despite occupying the same geographic spaces, the milieus in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations live their lives are very different. Economically, as indicated by labour market data, substantial barriers obviously remain, again regardless of location, to Indigenous Australians' access to social and economic resources. Spatially, despite the closing of reserves and missions and the removing of legislative restrictions, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people occupy different physical spaces and places, even within the same towns and cities.

Understanding the how and why of this differential placement is a prerequisite to answering the second unresolved question: how can this situation be turned around? It also makes clear that the unenviable Indigenous positioning is much more than its individual indicators suggest. Such indicators, low socio-economic status or low educational levels, are proxies, analytically amenable ways in which measurable aspects of disadvantage are operationalised. Housing figures for example, mean much more than just the proportions in rental or homeownership. Homeownership is a tangible aspect of what it means to live well in Australia and, as these data show, such aspirations remain outside the realm of possibility for a majority of Indigenous people. More crucially, the first question indicates that efforts to close the gap, educationally, employment-wise and in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, is a broad, complex and vital task, but, to date, probably a misunderstood one. Literal definitions or specific measures fail dismally to portray in any meaningful way the complex and dialectical relationships between these inherent aspects of Indigenous lives. These dimensions are indicators, not necessarily causes or cures, of the invidious Indigenous space within Australia's social strata.

Statistical data, even that with the robustness and coverage of the Census cannot, of course, ever provide a definitive picture. But the part-story visible from this analysis is one that indicates that despite the diversity, vibrancy and strength of Indigenous lives, such lives remain enmeshed in socio-economic inequality and circumscribed life options and life experiences. Bluntly, Indigenous Australians are overwhelmingly and unremittingly poor, in a uniquely Indigenous location, firmly wedged at the bottom of Australian society. The disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives overshadows intra-Indigenous diversity. Irrespective of the places in which they actually live, Indigenous Australians occupy a shared position in the socio-economic hierarchy; a shared, Indigenous-specific, Australian social class. This positioning restricts the capacity of Indigenous people caught within this space to envisage a different future. And such positioning does not just impact negatively on Indigenous people and peoples, the nation and all its citizens are poorer because of it.

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- ¹ In this essay the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' are both used. 'Indigenous' is used when it is not possible to determine whether the Census data refers to Aboriginal people only or includes Torres Strait Islander people. It is also used when referring to Australia's Indigenous peoples overall. Where the history of specific areas with an Aboriginal population is discussed, the term 'Aboriginal' is preferred to indicate their unique identity.
 - ² Data from the 2006 Census is the source of figures in this essay unless otherwise noted. The major exception is the national population data reported on page 3 which was drawn from the most recent source, the *Experimental Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, June 2006, Catalogue Number 3238.0.55.001.
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